

CHAPTER XIV

THE ACTION OF LONE PINE

(Sketches 14, 15, 16)

Sketch 14. THE main operation at Anzac on the night of the 6th/7th August—the assault of the frowning heights of Sari Bair—had been entrusted to the New Zealand and Australian Division, with other units attached. But the task allotted to the 1st Australian Division, though less spectacular, was indirectly just as important and in some respects even more difficult of accomplishment. In order to assist their comrades on the northern flank by inducing the Turk to send his reserves to the southern half of the line, the troops of the 1st Australian Division were to open the battle at Anzac by a series of vigorous attacks on and in the neighbourhood of 400 Plateau.

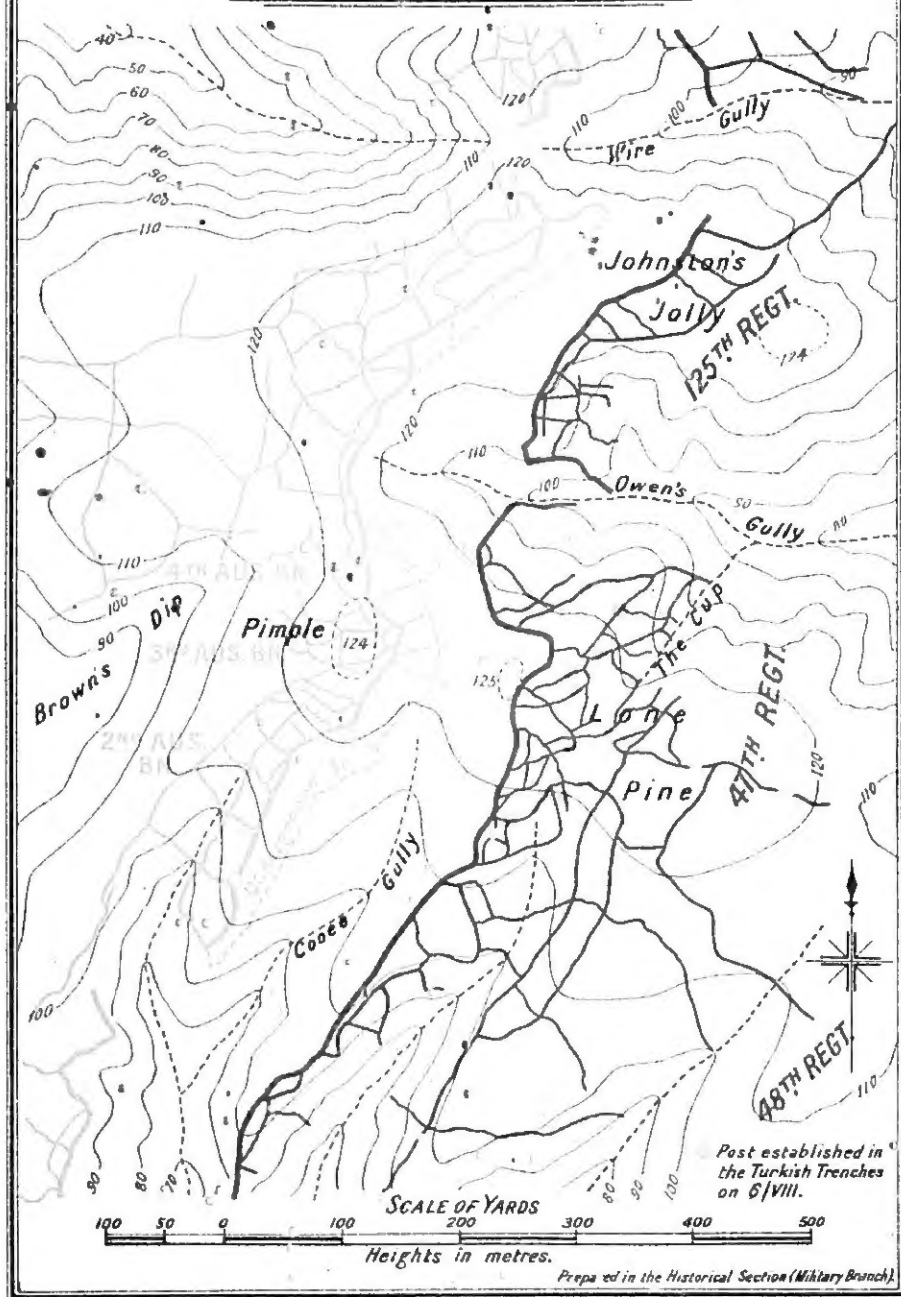
The initial attack was to be made on the Lone Pine position on the evening of the 6th by the 1st Australian Brigade. It was to be followed at midnight by the capture of German Officer's Trench by the 6th Battalion, 2nd Australian Brigade, and—provided all went well at Lone Pine—by an attack at dawn on the front-line trenches on the northern lobe of 400 Plateau, known as Johnston's Jolly.

Nor was this all. In the second phase of the operations, to be launched as soon as the general situation would permit, the whole division was to attack Gun Ridge and occupy a position from Scrubby Knoll on the left to Gaba Tepe on the right.

It will be seen, therefore, that the task of the 1st Australian Division on the opening night of the operations was far removed from a feint or a mere demonstration. Its successful accomplishment—in addition to reducing the resistance to be encountered by the principal attacks on the left—would drive a deep wedge into the enemy's main positions.

In point of fact the enemy's front-line system in this area proved far too strong to be broken by the unaided efforts of one infantry division. The assault on German Officer's Trench, though gallantly attempted twice, was unable to make progress,

LONE PINE, 6TH AUGUST.



and the enterprise against Johnston's Jolly was eventually cancelled for lack of sufficient troops. Nevertheless, so far as deceiving the enemy was concerned, the attack on Lone Pine fulfilled the intentions of the corps commander, and covered the attacking troops with glory.

The Turkish position known as Lone Pine consisted of the enemy's main system of trenches on the southern lobe of the 400 Plateau, immediately opposite to a salient in the Australian line known as the Pimple. The front-line trench, distant about 60-150 yards, was protected by some wire entanglements, and was in many places roofed with stout baulks of timber. It was connected on the north with Johnston's Jolly, and on the south with another strong work.

The frontage to be attacked amounted at most to 220 yards, and the approaches lay open to heavy enfilade fire from both flanks. To avoid this fire, tunnels had been dug under No Man's Land by the Australians, and the ends of the tunnels were to be opened up immediately before the assault.¹ No Man's Land was covered with scrub about two feet high.

The troops for the assault consisted of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Battalions of the 1st Australian Brigade (Br.-General N. M. Smyth, V.C.). The 1st Battalion formed the brigade reserve.

The action began at 4.30 P.M. with a bombardment of the Lone Pine and adjacent trenches by some 28 guns, including one field gun which had been dug in within 200 yards of the enemy's parapet. The cruiser *Bacchante* assisted by searching the valleys beyond, and the monitors by shelling the Turkish batteries north-east of Gaba Tepe.²

At 5.30 P.M. the three assaulting battalions surged forward to the attack in four lines, two lines dashing out from the forward ends of the tunnels and the other two over the top of the main Australian parapets.

The advance was so sudden that few casualties were suffered in covering No Man's Land, though the enemy's wire, which fortunately was not a serious obstacle, had not been well cut. But there was an anxious moment when the assaulting troops reached the Turkish front line. The overhead cover of heavy pine logs resisted all individual efforts to move it, and a crowd of men could be seen standing outside, some of them firing at point-blank range through the loop-holes at the Turkish garrison below. In a few minutes, however, many Australians had entered the trench at points where the head-

¹ See also page 114 for description of secret front-line trenches constructed on 400 Plateau.

² For composition of naval squadron off Anzac see Appendix 6.

Aug. cover was broken; many more rushed forward to the open communication trenches and approached the front line from the rear; and there, in the semi-darkened galleries, a desperate hand-to-hand struggle was fought to a finish.

By 5.40 P.M. the centre of the position had been reached, and twenty minutes later it became clear that despite enormous losses the attack had been successful. A number of small posts had been firmly established in the heart of the enemy's position.

At 7 P.M. the 1st Battalion was ordered forward to assist in the work of consolidation. But the Turks were not yet done with, and all through the night and for the next 48 hours they delivered a long succession of fierce bombing counter-attacks on the newly captured posts.¹ The Australian troops, however, reinforced in turn by the 12th and 7th battalions,² would not give up their gains, and their superb dash throughout these desperate encounters was described by Sir Ian Hamilton as "a glory to Australia".

Sketch
15.

By the morning of the 8th the worst of the fighting was over, but several more attacks were made by the Turks during the next few days in an effort to recapture their lost position. For the most part these attempts were unsuccessful, but it was not till the 12th August that it at last became clear that the Australians had gained complete ascendancy.

Throughout these days of incessant fighting the spirit of the Australian troops was beyond praise, and so great, and almost embarrassing, was the anxiety of the rank and file to take their share in this historic action that at one period the unique precaution had to be taken of posting piquets in the communication trenches leading to Lone Pine to prevent unauthorized men from going into the fight. Reserve troops would wait in long queues for a chance of pushing their way forward, and sums of five pounds and upwards were freely offered, and offered in vain, by employed men in rear to take the place of friends going up to the front line. No less than seven Victoria Crosses were awarded for gallantry at Lone Pine.³

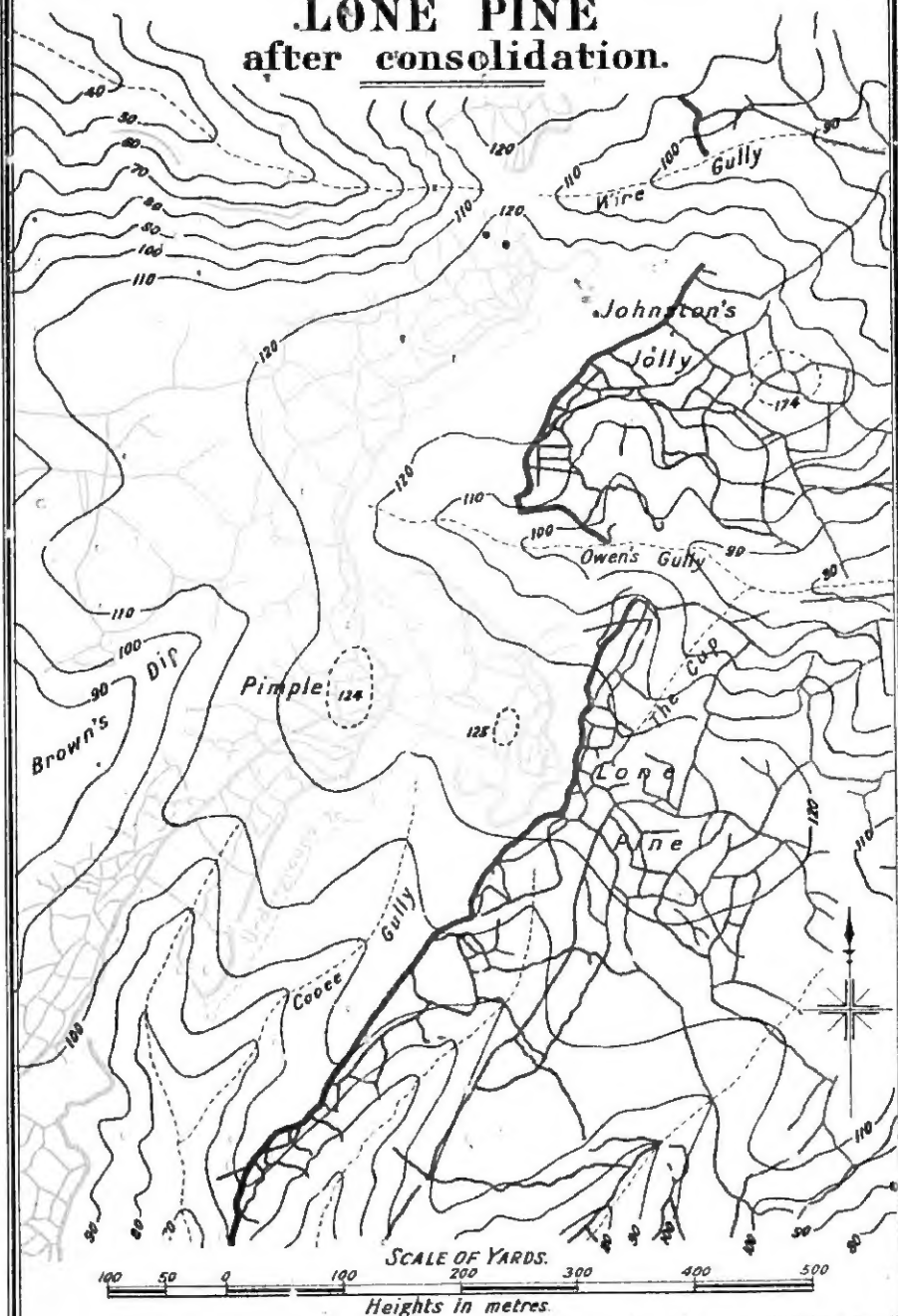
The Australian casualties in the attack and in the first two

¹ These attacks have been characterized by Dr. Bean, the Australian historian, as "one of the most severe bombing struggles in the history of the 'A.I.F.'" The full story of the Lone Pine fighting has been vividly described in his second volume of the Australian Official Account.

² The 7th Battalion was originally intended to attack Johnston's Jolly, but that attack was abandoned when it became clear that more troops would be needed to hold the captured posts in Lone Pine.

³ Capt. A. J. Shout and Pte. L. Keysor of the 1st Bn.; Pte. J. Hamilton, 3rd Bn.; and Lieuts. W. J. Symons and F. H. Tubb, and Corpls. A. S. Burton (killed) and W. Durlstan, all of the 7th Bn.

LONE PINE after consolidation.



Prepared in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Ordnance Survey 1930.

days' defence were exceptionally heavy and amounted to over Aug. 1,700 of all ranks.¹ The Turkish losses were computed at 5,000. Their trenches after the first day's fighting were a shambles, and over a thousand Turkish corpses had to be lifted out for burial.

During the early part of this action an ingenious plan for the rapid construction of a communication trench across No Man's Land proved invaluable. The Australian miners, working with gouges instead of picks and shovels, had driven a special gallery to within 25 yards of the enemy's line. On the afternoon of the 6th August this gallery was opened up by the explosion of three mines, and after the capture of the position the long narrow crater thus formed was quickly converted into a communication trench which greatly simplified the task of clearing the wounded and sending up reserves and ammunition.

The severe fighting at Lone Pine on the evening and night of the 6th amply fulfilled the intentions of the Anzac corps commander. It drew towards that portion of the front the whole of Essad Pasha's available reserves,² and was largely responsible for the fact that on the morning of the 7th there were not more troops available for the defence of the Turkish northern flank.

Unfortunately, however, the very vigour of the Australian onslaught to some extent contributed to the undoing of Birdwood's main plan. So anxious was Essad Pasha, on the evening of the 6th, for the safety of his southern flank, that in addition to sending his reserves to Lone Pine, he ordered up two regiments of Colonel Kannengiesser's *9th Division* from south of Gaba Tepe. Pushing on in advance of his troops, Kannengiesser was told about midnight that they would not after all be required on Lone Pine. But Kannengiesser was now on the spot, and available to reinforce the northern flank. Early next morning he was sent to Chunuk Bair, and arrived at that vital point with a handful of men in the nick of time to forestall the New Zealand attack.

¹ Lieut.-Col. R. Scobie, 2nd Bn., was killed and Lieut.-Col. E. S. Brown, 3rd Bn., mortally wounded.

² Both regiments of the *5th Division* in reserve at Koja Dere were rushed forward to Lone Pine on the night of the 6th.